



ULSTER COUNTY NEWS

ULSTER COUNTY NEWS INFORMATION
OFFICE OF ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE
244 FAIR STREET
KINGSTON, NEW YORK 12401

PHONE: 845.340-3900
FAX: 845.340.3651
www.co.ulster.ny.us
www.ulstercountyny.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 26, 2006

Contact: Elie Gruber, Ulster County Mental Health Dept.
(845) 340-4173
Family of Woodstock
Hotline (845) 338-2370

Ulster County Suicide Prevention Campaign Kicks Off

"This shows Michael over the twenty years I had with him," said Ruth Kenrick, MA, LCSW, clinical supervisor at the Ulster County Mental Health Department as she held up a poster covered with photos of a young, thoughtful-looking man. In a panel presentation on suicide given to crisis hotline workers at Family of Woodstock, Kenrick spoke briefly yet powerfully about losing her partner to suicide, about the difficult mourning and sense of isolation she felt. "People said, 'I can't even imagine what you're going through,'" Kenrick recalled. "Can you imagine how alone that made me feel?" Yet other friends and acquaintances were helpful by "just being with me" and not trying to say something profound, give advice, or remove themselves from her life because they were afraid of saying the wrong thing.

The panel presentation takes a topic which is often not discussed and brings it out into the open. Myths about suicide are dispelled. "The biggest myth is that by asking someone if they are thinking about suicide, you will 'put an idea' into their head," says Mary Barber, MD, clinical director at the Ulster County Mental Health Department. "Not only is this untrue, but by talking openly about suicide you have the opportunity to get someone the help they may need and save their life." Ellen Pendegar, CEO of the Mental Health Association in Ulster County, the agency which is co-leading Ulster's suicide prevention efforts, agreed. "We need to lift the stigma of talking about suicide, which parallels the stigma surrounding depression and other mental illnesses. These are problems which touch the lives of so many people." Pendegar cited the statistic that while 10,000 people die from homicides in the US each year, the number of deaths from suicide is three times greater at 30,000.

The Ulster County Mental Health Department and the Mental Health Association began planning their suicide prevention campaign earlier this year, following a meeting held by the NY State Office of Mental Health. Barber and Pendegar put together a multi-

--more--

agency task force which has been meeting monthly to plan activities in the county. One of these activities is the panel presentation. The presentation is designed to be given at meetings or forums in the community, and lasts 20 minutes. The panel includes facts about suicide and warning signs to look for, a speaker who can discuss a personal experience with suicide him or herself or with a family member, and practical tips on how to talk to someone who might be suicidal and how to get help for the person.

“We were happy to be the preview site for this presentation,” said Tamara Cooper of Family of Woodstock, who also was a co-presenter on the panel. “Our hotline workers speak with people regularly who are thinking about suicide, and we think this talk serves an important need.” Attendees at the presentation agreed that the message was one of hope, and gave those in attendance an opportunity to consider what can be a difficult and taboo topic.

For more information or to schedule the panel discussion at your agency or event, call Elie Gruber at the Ulster County Mental Health Department (845) 340-4173. For mental health referral information or crisis intervention, call the Family of Woodstock hotline at (845) 338-2370.